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ABSTRACT

This booklet, one of a series of background papers for the White House Conference, presents information and referral services as one of the ways libraries are developing programs to discharge their responsibilities to the public they serve. It details the determination of a woman librarian in Detroit to develop the first comprehensive I&R service ever to be tried in a public library. Planning involved (1) organizing a community information file, (2) structuring operating procedures, (3) establishing amicable relationships with local social services and government agencies, and (4) familiarizing the staff with the philosophy and methods of I&R service. The paper moves on past the Detroit experience to Memphis and then to Houston--each city's program different from the others. It also discusses some of the much narrower information programs aimed at particular community groups in need of specialized assistance and presents the information needs of rural areas and remote wilderness regions which can only be served by mobile book vans. Particular attention is given to the requirements of the elderly. Technology and how it can be effectively used to extend the scope of information and referral services is discussed at length. (Author/RAA)

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NEIGHBORHOOD INFORMATION SERVICE CENTERS

Public Library "Information and Referral" Provides Significant New Personal Service to the Individual Library User

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A Background Paper for the White House Conference on Library and Information Services

published by the

National Citizens Emergency Committee to Save Our Public Libraries in cooperation with the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science American Library Association Urban Libraries Council

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INTRODUCTION

> To most people the public library is still a bunch of books presided over by a Gorgon with a date-stamp and a fiendish set of rules designed to lock the books away from people.
>
> Fay M. Blake and Jane Irby, "The Selling of the Public Library," *Drexel Library Quarterly*, January–April 1976

. . . And, sad to relate, there are still many librarians who want to keep it just that way. Fortunately the realization that public libraries have a responsibility to all residents of the communities they serve is beginning to take hold in America, and one of the ways it is happening is through Information and Referral Centers.

It all began in 1971, with the firm determination of a woman librarian in Detroit. The exciting story of that experiment is told in this paper, along with each step in the unraveling of one of the most remarkable revolutions in information delivery systems since the invention of the book. Here, for the first time, on neutral ground, free from prying, irritable petty officials, any citizen could ask questions about things that vitally mattered, and could expect a courteous, helpful, and constructive response—all without charge.

The paper moves on past the Detroit experience to Memphis and then to Houston—each city's program different from the others. Then it discusses some of the much narrower information programs aimed at particular community groups in need of specialized assistance. The paper then goes on to dis-

cuss information needs in rural areas and remote wilderness regions which can only be served by mobile book vans. Particular attention is given to the information requirements of the elderly.

Technology, and how it can be effectively used to extend the scope of information and referral services, is discussed at length.

Here is one of the most exciting new achievements of public libraries in the modern world. Based on the experience of only a few short years, we have now developed the potential ability to open up the information resources of the entire nation to every man, woman, and child in America, through the public library.

NEIGHBORHOOD INFORMATION SERVICE CENTERS

Clara S. Jones, a magnetic black woman with a soft voice, was promoted to the directorship of the Detroit Public Library after serving as a branch librarian for eighteen years. She had witnessed the massive exodus of the middle class from the city and the influx of poor, ill-educated rural Americans driven from the land by agricultural modernization—blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Indians, and southern whites. It was an experience Detroit shared with almost every older industrialized city in America. As the poor flooded into the cities, the employers moved out to the suburbs.

The 1960s in Detroit had been marked by bloody racial riots and a prolonged bitter fight over school desegregation. The poor found themselves locked into angry ghettos without access to the better industrial jobs and without the organizational levers and the traditional information network (the druggist, the building superintendent, the locally elected government official, the church) that had helped earlier waves of immigrants cope with ghetto life.

In response to the growing need for special assistance there evolved a bewildering array of public and private services designed to serve the employment, housing, health, education, and recreational needs of the new residents. This growth in social service programs meant increased bureaucracies and government specialization. Those in need could benefit from the expanded services only if they knew of their existence, knew eligibility rules, knew where and when to go to obtain help, and knew how to cope with impersonal relations and the baffling array of forms (most agency forms require a lit-

eracy level well beyond the capabilities of most welfare recipients).

A Rand Corporation study showed a decline of 41.4 percent in Detroit's Public Library transactions during the 1960s, producing a $2.75 rate per transaction, the highest rate of major cities in decline. The growing population of Detroit residents who were poor and undereducated clearly were out of touch with the public library and what it could do to help them. Detroit's main library had become a facility used primarily by university students, businesses, and suburbanites. The average citizen of Detroit was not gaining any direct benefit from library service supported by his own taxes.

A landmark 1949 report, *Public Library Inquiry*, had pointed out that even in the late 1940s, when book circulation and reading were climbing, public libraries failed to serve some 75–85 percent of the population in their communities. Persuaded they were serving the community's leadership, persuaded of the efficacy of "filter down," librarians lived complacently with that concept until the urban turnaround of the 1960s wiped out their traditional clientele.

Clara Jones later recalled her experiences as a branch librarian to a meeting of the American Library Association in 1973. "I was an active proponent of 'outreach' into the community and the library administration gave me free rein," she said. "At one branch library in particular we brought groups of every description into the building for meetings and programs, and the staff did their best to inspire interest in reading and library use. We made the library well known in the community by speaking at churches, labor unions, block clubs, parent-teacher organizations—wherever people gathered—and on radio and television as well. This created tremendous neighborhood goodwill for the library, and had a very slight favorable effect on statistics in that one area of the

city, but no trend was stopped or started. I never wavered in the conviction that 'outreach' activity is valid and greatly needed, but it was discouraging to work so hard for such slight reward. Somehow, the library's offering was not compelling or competitive enough, and there was no irresistible product, no service that touched lives at the 'gut level.'"

When Mrs. Jones became the director of the Detroit Public Library, she possessed a deep commitment to extending library services to serve all the citizens of Detroit, and not just a select few. Recognizing that there was no comprehensive community information and referral service in Detroit, Clara Jones concluded that the library was the logical coordinator of information services: Librarians have the capacity and experience to organize and provide access to a great bulk of material, and libraries serve the entire community as public, nonprofit institutions which stand above politics and partisanship.

In 1970, shortly after her appointment as director, Mrs. Jones made a bold decision. She told her staff that information and referral (I&R) services would become the library's number one priority in the main library and in all branches. Accurate, up-to-date survival information was to be made available to every Detroiter, both by telephone and on a walk-in basis. This would mean that any citizen of Detroit would be able, as in the past, to get answers to traditional reference questions—those found within the pages of books on the library's shelves (Where are George Washington's false teeth exhibited? What is a nematode? Who killed Alexander Hamilton?)—but would now also be able to find out how to select a nursing home for aged parents; where to get special health care treatment; and what are a tenant's rights to have heat during winter months.

It was a pioneering concept, never attempted before on a

planned basis in any major public library system in the country.

Getting Started

The Detroit Public Library was ready to launch its pioneer experiment in I&R by January 1971. Everything had to be developed from scratch and within existing budget allocations. Initially, no additional funds were available for the project. The city itself was in economic peril. There was no I&R road map available—information and referral services had never been put into operation on a system-wide basis in any public library in the United States. I&R programs had been tested out at the Langston Hughes Branch Library in New York City and at some War Information Centers operated in a few cities during World War II. This, however, was the first comprehensive community I&R service ever to be tried in a public library.

The library's administration recognized that what it was doing was revolutionary—the entire library system was to be transformed into a comprehensive community information center—and it was well aware that such a revolution would require planning, organization, and, above all, commitment. All full-time staff—every librarian, every clerk—participated in training sessions. A professor from Wayne State Graduate School of Social Work in Detroit and a local social worker, both of whom were familiar with I&R in the social work field, were enlisted to help the library work out its program. The following initial planning steps were identified as basic needs: (1) gather information and organize a community in-

formation file; (2) structure operating procedures; (3) establish amicable relations with local social service and government agencies; and (4) familiarize the staff with the philosophy and methods of I&R service. It was recognized that it would be two years before the library would be ready to open its TIP (The Information Place) service to the public.

Clara Jones smiles when other librarians discuss I&R as if it is just another routine library service off the shelf. "Sometimes librarians have said to us, 'We'd like to subscribe to your service,' like some people would subscribe to the New York Times Information Bank. But it is not a separate little add-on kind of thing. Any library undertaking to introduce I&R must understand that they are undergoing a transformation. As far as libraries are concerned, it means joining the rest of the community, the rest of humanity—you're not separating into an ivory tower, you're joining up."

Setting up the Central Community Information File

The initial Detroit move was to set up a staff I&R planning committee. The committee started out with a membership of ten, but this soon dwindled down to four actively involved branch librarians. The committee members went to work to develop the community information file because there was no one else to do it. This core group became the TIP clearinghouse staff, responsible for the central community information file and eventually for supervision of the whole TIP program. Applying cataloging skills to structuring the file, they worked out procedures as they went along. They did a

great deal of telephoning and mailings, beginning with the governmental agencies in the city. Leaders of the city's health and welfare agencies, the president of the Common Council, and representatives of various other city agencies met with library staff at workshops which had been set up to help determine the goals and objectives of the I&R program. From these contacts it became clear to the library staff and administration that no decentralized information and referral service was available to Detroit.

From the outset the library realized that there was no point in just collecting information without knowing what information the members of the Detroit community needed and wanted. They turned to the city planners for help. A three-volume study of Detroit had been prepared by the international city planner Constantinos Doxiadis in the late 1960s. The City Planning Commission provided all demographic information for an area within a mile and a half radius of each branch library, the standard service area of each branch. Workbooks were prepared for each branch showing complete statistical information from the census figures for the service area of that branch. Slides were made showing population shifts reflected on maps and charts covering the period from the beginning of Detroit's history to megalopolis projections for the twenty first century. These were used in a series of presentations to the library's staff. An analysis of the ethnic characteristics of each neighborhood began to take shape, detailing such data as the percentage of children; age groups; educational levels; and employment statistics.

Despite the usefulness of the demographic historical profiles of the Detroit neighborhoods, the question "Who is out there?" remained only partially answered. The librarians needed more specific, human, and dynamic knowledge about the people who were represented by census data.

Community Walks

Out of a series of workshops for branch library heads on the implementation of the I&R service emerged the technique of informal community analysis known as the "community walk"—a technique that since has been widely copied by other libraries in other parts of the country to establish closer links with their communities. Michele Kapecky, who worked with the TIP program from the beginning, describes the initial experience:

> We decided we could identify information needs by the questions we were asked, that these questions were, in fact, statements of informational needs. So Detroit Public Library set out on its TIP community walks. We walked from our branch libraries to the neighborhood grocery, barbershop, police stations, variety store, pharmacy, gas station, and wherever else we could find. We told people, our own public, that the library can help them, that that library on the corner two blocks away can answer questions, not just questions about books, school, and homework, but questions about their lives, their problems, and their own community.
>
> The response was in every sense overwhelming. On the spot, people asked for a notary public, a part-time employee, someone to call about a cracked and broken sidewalk, and where and how to apply for Social Security benefits. They asked—our public—if the library would lend space for a block club meeting, if the library would like to join the neighborhood business association, if the library would attend the next police-community relations meeting. They presented us, in very clear and concise terms, with their informational needs and then asked us to respond to those needs.

The goals of the community walks were twofold: (1) to advertise the services of the library, describing not only the new information and referral services but also the other services offered by the system; and (2) to learn the needs and wants of the community, the existing services, and how the library could best link its resources to existing agencies and groups. Whenever community services were identified that were relevant to people's needs, the library workers would collect all pertinent information and send it on to the clearinghouse at the main library. Slowly but surely the TIP files were built up from this information.

Community walks were conducted by all the professional and clerical staff of each branch, operating in teams of two.

Deputy Director Robert Croneberger and social worker Carolyn Luck later wrote about the difficulties in getting the community walks started:

> There were many legitimate fears expressed about the community walk concept, revolving mostly around fear of the neighborhood, the discomfort of being outside the library building and into someone else's "turf," the distaste that some felt about "selling" the services of the library, and the general resistance to a change in the basic job duties of a librarian. For the most part, these fears were abated by the experience of the walks. There were very few rebuffs, and the businesses and agencies in the communities expressed a great deal of interest and enthusiasm for the project.

The two social workers hired by the library trained branch librarians to conduct interviews and prepare reports. They also provided orientation on the operations of community organizations and how communities function. The social workers accompanied timid staff members on their first walk.

The community walk became the basic tool used in Detroit to learn about neighborhoods and to let people know what

was happening at the library. One of its major values was that it served as a vehicle for getting the librarians outside the walls of their libraries and into their communities. Everybody benefited.

Getting to Know Community Organizations

Valuable as census data and community walks were, they often produced the impression of disconnected individuals confined within set geographical limits and described by statistics. Such analysis was obviously useless if it did not include the ways in which these individuals are interrelated through existing groups and organizations. In order to understand the total community, it was essential to learn what organized efforts were already being made to meet people's needs, what information had already been gathered, and what opportunities existed to cooperate with others to achieve mutual objectives. The library therefore set out to establish informal contact with all local groups, from block clubs to community mental health centers and churches. Some kinds of information about communities are best learned through these kinds of contacts.

Croneberger tells the story of the Detroit Public Library's repeated efforts to reach out to a recent influx of Iraqis. The library distributed flyers and posters printed in Arabic, but with no results. Then the librarians went out into the community and learned that their new neighbors were Chaldeans, Catholic Iraqis with a distinctive language, religion, and culture different from that of their Arab Iraqi oppressors from whom they had fled. Arabic was most decidedly *not* the language with which to attract them to the library. Instead, the

library was able to contact the recent immigrants through a multiethnic community organization that had a sizable and active representation from the hard-to-reach Chaldeans. Not long after that initiative was taken, members of the group began to find their way to the library to seek information about their new home and new life.

The data on Detroit's community services was all assembled in the central clearinghouse and then distributed to participating branches. The cards were color-coded to show which services were only available in the particular neighborhood served by each individual branch.

The Trial Run

Initial I&R operations began with three Detroit branches, one of which was the Bowen Branch in Detroit's heavily industrialized southwest section. Bowen lies in the shadow of the Ford Motor Company's Rouge complex, the General Motors Cadillac assembly plant, and the blast furnaces of the Great Lakes Steel Corporation. The community the branch served had once been largely East European. It was now rapidly becoming a predominantly Spanish-speaking community of close to 10,000 persons. Few of them came into the library. For several years library use had been on the decline. Using Federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) demonstration funds, a storefront library, the Biblioteca de la Gente (Library of the People), was opened up four blocks from Bowen. A bilingual staff, made up of local residents, and a popularly oriented book collection brought a large number of patrons into the storefront. Recalls Clara Jones, "We set up an I&R station there. We had two Spanish-speaking

librarians—Chicanos—one black and one white. It was like putting a sponge into water—the people just *soaked up* the services."

After the Biblioteca de la Gente became well established, the library administration moved the whole operation—lock, stock, and librarians—into the Bowen Branch. Spanish-speaking patrons who formerly used the storefront easily made the transition and brought others with them as well. A successful new start with the community had been accomplished.

Developing an Advocacy Role

While the library was still operating out of its storefront, a man came in one day and started talking with one of the librarians in Spanish. He told her he was part of a work crew that had been hired to go across town to do some day labor work. The men had been told they would be paid at the end of the job, which lasted six weeks. When the men were laid off, they were told that a truck would return the following Saturday morning with their pay. Saturday morning came but the truck never showed up. The workmen, who could hardly speak English, didn't know what to do. The librarian put in a telephone call to a city agency and stayed with it to make sure the men got the kind of attention they needed. The employers were apprehended and were forced to pay the men every bit of what they were owed. All of a sudden the library had assumed the role of an advocate for a patron in need. There was a natural concern as to whether librarians should take on such an unfamiliar role as activists. Clara Jones saw no problem:

> The trick is to not enter it personally. You get the information that they need, and they make the decision as to how far they want to go. You put them in touch with the agency. You have to use your judgment, sometimes you give the information to the person and he calls himself, other times you see the person needs some help and can't handle the situation, then you call and say, "I'm so and so from the Detroit Public Library." They're much more likely to listen to you and to handle the case. Very often, you are deliberately using the prestige of the library to help that person . . . so when you get into advocacy, you have to know what you're doing, know your limitations, but also know to what extent you can really help people.

"How I wish I could have had something like this to offer years ago as I moved about the community," adds former librarian Jones wistfully. "Something to offer people that would answer a life-size need."

Going After New Business

The staff at Bowen were keen community walkers. Not only did they systematically visit social agencies, government offices, churches, and neighborhood groups, but they sent out three-member teams to go door to door in residential areas, hoping to reach those who were isolated and who were not connected with any of the information networks in the area, such as churches and social agencies. One team member would speak over a public address system mounted on a staff car while the other two distributed TIP flyers at each home. James Evenhuis, branch librarian at Bowen, describes what it was like: "The announcement on the loud speaker gave a

brief introduction to TIP and ended with the statement to residents that more information was being handed out at their front doors. Both the announcement over the public address system and the flyers were in English and Spanish. These door-to-door canvasses produced immediate results, with TIP questions coming into the branch usually before the outreach team returned. Also, the staff found that many of the people who called were senior citizens who had little knowledge of the library and no knowledge that a TIP service existed."

The staff at Bowen had been particularly fortunate in establishing good relations with neighborhood agencies. One of their first moves was to join the Southwest Detroit Community and Interagency Council, made up of some seventy groups and agencies. At the council's monthly informal luncheons where any member may get up and pass on information about programs or services, the librarians explained the new TIP service and other branch services designed to reach all segments of the area. Observes Mr. Evenhuis:

> To the staff's pleasure and surprise, the agencies immediately welcomed the library's expanded role in information and referral, and stated they would cooperate with TIP and use TIP themselves. No agency in southwest Detroit expressed the feeling that the library was out of place in instituting a community information and referral service. On the contrary, most felt that the problems of Detroit were so great that all services should work together and be fully utilized.

The numbers of people using the services of the Bowen Branch began to grow impressively. During the first year of TIP operation, the branch experienced a 25 percent gain in book circulation, and during the second year an additional 10 to 15 percent gain. A dying branch library had reestablished itself by becoming a vital factor in community life—a com-

prehensive community information center, integrating new services with traditional ones while still continuing to function basically as a library.

In a 1974 evaluation, Hardy Franklin and F. William Summers noted:

> In the Bowen Branch the [TIP] services are clearly a basic part of the library service and the staff makes no differentiation between [TIP] and any other service. . . . The atmosphere in the Bowen Branch is very impressive in that there is a great deal of activity and unusually high rapport between the staff and the users. It is impossible to separate the contribution of [TIP] from the contribution of the staff. The staff works very well together, have a high commitment to the users they serve and are very much a part of the community. It is quite likely that the Bowen Branch would be an active and exciting place without the [TIP] services; on the other hand, TIP has been a valuable vehicle for the staff to relate to the community in a very broad way.

System-wide Operations

In June 1973 TIP service was instituted in all of Detroit's twenty-nine branches. A year-long publicity campaign was donated by a major Detroit advertising agency. Detroit residents listening to the radio, watching TV, riding buses, scanning billboards on the street, were urged to "tell your problems to the library" by calling the TIP phone number, 321-1111. At the outset three thousand calls a month came in for TIP. By a year later the number had risen to ten thousand calls a month. Phone calls account for about 90 percent of all TIP inquiries. About half of all phone calls received seek I&R information; the balance are traditional library queries.

Today TIP keeps track of some fifteen hundred organizations—any type that provides some kind of service to the public from health, education, and welfare services to chess clubs and cooking classes. For each agency there are perhaps ten separate headings directing the inquirer to that service, thereby providing roughly fifteen thousand information entries to needed services. Information is constantly updated, both at the central library and at the branches. The program currently receives from five thousand to eight thousand telephone requests a month, plus a couple of thousand queries from people who come to the library itself. The TIP service is available seven days a week.

TIP can tell inquirers where to get a senior citizen bus card, where to get a cancer checkup, where to learn a trade. People calling for information about nursing homes can be put in touch with an organization called Citizens for Better Care, a group familiar with nursing home care in the area; people with landlord-tenant problems may be referred to the Small Claims Court or a legal aid service that will help them specifically with a landlord-tenant dispute. A low-income mother who worries there is something wrong with her child's diet, or who calls because she has heard about "some place" where she can get special food for her baby, is directed to a supplemental food program run by the Detroit Department of Health for pregnant or breast-feeding women and for children under four years of age. TIP gets a lot of phone calls from people who want to go back to secondary school but don't know how to go about it. They are told where they may go for preparatory classes for a high school equivalency examination.

TIP librarians take time to give inquirers enough information so that they can deal with the situation for themselves. TIP also follows up on many of its referrals. A man in need

of medical care who had been refused service by his doctor when he discovered that his patient was no longer covered by medical insurance recently called TIP for help. The librarian referred the caller to Detroit General Hospital for free medical treatment and smoothed the way at the clinic by calling and making an appointment for him. The caller was upset at having to take "charity" for the first time in his life. The librarian explained to him that as a taxpayer he was entitled to free medical service. The librarian took the man's name and phone number and later followed up to see how the hospital referral worked out.

A black woman on public assistance with four children called TIP in utter frustration. She needed to go into the hospital for an operation, but because she had no proof that she was covered by Medicaid, the hospital would not admit her. Although she was indeed covered, her social worker, harried and overworked, was not taking steps to help her. Phone calls by the librarian to the community affairs office of the Michigan Department of Social Services and to the hospital straightened out the matter. It was simply a question of someone interceding for the woman and verbalizing her need. A librarian filled the bill.

The key to Detroit's success with I&R has been the complete involvement of the library staff. "In Detroit, our librarians are not considered information and referral specialists. We are information and referral generalists," says Mrs. Jones. "Whatever the question, the person who gets it answers it. That's the reason we did all the training of the entire staff, so that whoever picks up the phone or waits on the person is equipped to answer. One of the advantages that the library has over other institutions is that they have this whole backup of the body of human knowledge. You know the Dewey

Decimal System, 000 to 999—well, that covers anything anybody ever did, hoped to do, or thought or dreamed about."

The Memphis Experience

In 1975 the two administrators chiefly responsible for implementation of the I&R service at the Detroit Public Library, Robert Croneberger and Carolyn Luck, were hired by the Memphis/Shelby County (Tennessee) Public Library to initiate an I&R service there, to be called LINC (Library Information Center). The situation the team found at Memphis was close to ideal. Not only was the staff of the library eager to implement the service, but there were sufficient funds to see the project well launched. The library had been awarded a two-year grant of $368,000 out of federal revenue sharing monies to provide comprehensive information and referral services for the area. The library had won out over some forty competing agencies to be selected as one of three human service agencies awarded federal funds.

None of this came about overnight. At about the same time that Detroit launched its plans for system-wide I&R services, the Memphis Library officially changed its name to Memphis/Shelby County Public Library *and Information Center.* A committee of library staff, which had met for more than six months under the leadership of Assistant Director Larry Bone to hammer out objectives and goals in support of the new name, had determined that reference and information service would be the top objective of the library for the 1970s. "This function," their statement explained, "covers all types of information service to the total community in Mem-

phis and Shelby County, to all age, economic, and educational levels." Service to disadvantaged citizens was to be a primary target for the seventies. Education, cultural, and recreational functions were to remain priorities, but they would hold second, third, and fourth positions behind information.

At a time when a number of large city public libraries were losing momentum in the face of the challenge of a changing urban scene, the policy statement of the Memphis committee assumed a national importance.

Initially, however, the staff's view of "community information" consisted primarily of compiling information about local club activities and publishing a community calendar of events. But the library's outreach efforts in ghetto areas began to focus staff attention on people's need for more basic, life-coping information. Says C. Lamar Wallis, director of the Memphis/Shelby County Library, "These people weren't asking book questions. They weren't asking 'What's the population of Tokyo' or 'How many miles is it to Timbuctoo?' They wanted to know 'What do I do with my child that has all these spots all over him?' 'How do I get through to people? Every time I call Welfare I can't understand what they're talking about; they tell me I'm not eligible—I don't know what to do.'"

The Memphis librarians discovered that numerous public and private "information and referral centers" served the area, but that these specialized in one or more human services, and most existed with but one outlet and were little known or used by the vast majority of those who needed their services. United Way's I&R service was primarily concerned with health and welfare services; City Hall's Information and Complaint Center handled local governmental questions; the Federal Information Center handled federal inquiries; the Federal Job Information Center was concerned with U. S.

Civil Service positions. There were, in addition, numerous in-house information centers such as that of the State Welfare Department. Then there was also an array of private information and referral centers: Help Now!; the Action, Please department of *The Commercial Appeal;* Call for Action; and others. Numerous directories had been published with much of the information they contained hopelessly out-of-date even before publication. I&R in Memphis was a maze within a maze.

Problems with Other Agencies

The competition for a piece of the federal revenue sharing funds had left a residue of hard feelings with the human service agencies toward the library. The library's proposal, for example, had won out over a similar proposal put forward by United Way. For any number of small agencies, getting a tiny fraction of the money the library had received would have ensured survival for another year or two.

Upon their arrival in Memphis in 1975, Croneberger and Luck immediately set about the task of bridge-building with the alienated human service agencies. On the very first day Croneberger and Luck were in Memphis, a public meeting was held in the auditorium of the main library to which agencies were invited in order to hear the library's plans to implement I&R service and to provide the agencies an opportunity to ask questions. More than one hundred people attended the meeting. Croneberger and Luck attempted to explain that the library was not going to take over from anyone; that each agency was the expert in its own particular area and would

have to provide the expertise; and that the library was simply a backup agency for all of them.

Croneberger and Luck bought some time at that meeting. Most of the participants, it seemed, moved a little closer to skepticism and away from hostility. Carolyn Luck recalled recently, "We immediately began to compile resource files through direct telephone interviews with agency personnel and through a process that gave them input. Basically what we did was send them copies of what we compiled and gave them a period of time to call us and say, 'We'd rather have it say this' or 'Put it in this form. . . .' There was room to negotiate then and the agencies began to recognize this was an open system. We used the best people the library had to gather the information for the resource file."

"The human services community really has to be considered and worked with," says Croneberger. "The key to a successful I&R operation is the nature of the relationship with agencies." Fortunately, the eagerness of the Memphis Library's staff eliminated the time-consuming process of overcoming staff reluctance to get involved in community I&R. This made it possible to concentrate on building a good rapport with agency personnel on the professional level.

Direct Staff Liaison with Agencies

Each member of the LINC I&R staff was assigned the job of liaison with specific community agencies within a particular service area. Thus, for example, one librarian would be detailed to work in the mental health service area. He or she would visit the pertinent agencies, participate in interagency organizations, and keep the rest of the staff informed of de-

velopments in the mental health area. Other staff members covered health care, criminal justice, services for the handicapped, senior citizens, children and youth, and so forth.

Staff participation provides high visibility for LINC with other agencies and frequently leads to shared projects. To cite one recent example, LINC has joined in a campaign mounted by community health agencies to educate the public about hypertension. Part of bringing hypertension under control is letting people know where they can have their blood pressure easily tested free. LINC maintains a Health Department list of churches, shopping centers, and other nonclinic locations where people can be tested. The Health Department has given LINC advice on how inquiries should be handled. The health professionals have explained why it is important to ask, "Do you think you are having a problem now, or is this just a routine check?" In the latter case, LINC refers the caller to the mobile unit of the Health Department, which usually takes several days. If the caller thinks he or she may have an immediate problem, LINC uses a priority listing of clinics where callers get quick results.

LINC has also cooperated with the Memphis Health Department in encouraging indigent people to utilize neighborhood clinics for primary health care instead of going to heavily overused emergency wards of the city's major hospitals. LINC agreed to handle a public education campaign to let people know the location of their nearest clinic and the kinds of services—dental, pediatrics, maternity, etc.—that are available. The Health Department supplied LINC with a detailed list and a map of where the clinics were located, and the LINC telephone number was used in all of the extensive media publicity. So successful was the campaign that the Health Department is now expanding the number of neighborhood clinics.

An unforeseen benefit of LINC-agency staff liaison work has been the spread of knowledge in the social work field about library resources, a vital aspect of librarianship that has been almost totally ignored. At a meeting of professional day-care workers, participants complained of their inability to obtain a copy of a bill pending before Congress which would seriously affect their profession. They had written to every source they could think of in Washington, D.C. It had never occurred to them to try the Memphis Library, which is a depository for federal documents. At the suggestion of the library representative at the meeting, a copy of the bill was located at the library in a matter of minutes. Almost every working session of an interagency meeting gives the library representative another opportunity to let people know "the information is in the library."

Another important aspect of agency liaison work is arranging for in-service training. A representative from the government agency charged with handling child-abuse and child-neglect problems is asked to explain to librarians how they can best make referrals to the agency, to explain what they need to listen for when they talk to callers. A worker in a mental health agency with special training in gerontology is asked to talk about how to better communicate with older callers. This is all part of the give-and-take which is necessary to make the library a full partner in the growing array of public agencies helping the people of the community.

Croneberger and Luck regard interagency cooperation as the crucial element in I&R services.

> Library-based I&R provides services not only to the public but to a totally different profession. There is no way the library can gain credibility with "human services" without talking the same language, or being able to make appropriate referrals or jointly solve problems in a constructive way.

Until we librarians begin to interact with other agency workers and to cooperatively solve the problems, we're not going to be making the right decisions.

I&R is being touted as the salvation for libraries; that is, it is going to make libraries more relevant to the community. It's only going to make them more relevant to the community if they're more relevant to the other agencies in the community.

Library-Agency Working Guidelines

LINC has worked out detailed guidelines in cooperation with the agencies involved for handling difficult or recurring personal problems. These include guidelines on abortion referrals, on funeral and burial assistance, on payment of utility bills. When, for example, a caller requests information on day care for children, LINC uses the zip code of the caller to identify conveniently located facilities and provides the names of all nearby day-care centers licensed by the Tennessee Department of Human Services. Although the Department of Human Services does not publish the licensing grades of day-care centers, the caller is encouraged to visit a particular center, look for the licensing grade, which the center is required to display, and then ask the Department of Human Services for an explanation of that grade. LINC guidelines also call for advising the caller that the Licensing Section of the Department of Health Services maintains a list of approved family day-care homes which it subsidizes and a list of private day-care homes which have been visited and appear to provide acceptable child care. The guidelines suggest that the caller be told about the pamphlet "Some Ways of Distin-

guishing a Good Early Childhood Program," published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Finally, the guidelines call for recommending that the caller visit any day-care center personally before deciding to use it. The quality of the service LINC can deliver is enormously enhanced by this kind of richly detailed information.

LINC librarians do not counsel, in the sense that if a caller inquires about particular health services, he or she is simply told what is available under the LINC guidelines. He is not asked if he wants counseling or any other kind of service as well. This is the function of the agencies to which the caller is referred. Routinely, all LINC callers are asked to call back if they need more help. When LINC follows up a call, it is strictly for the purposes of learning whether LINC gave the right information and to check whether the agency could help.

The Price of Success

C. Lamar Wallis, director of the Memphis Public Library, believes that the inauguration of I&R services is the best thing that ever happened to the library. "It has made us a lot of friends, especially among the public agencies. They have been willing to go to bat for us. Individuals also say that they have great confidence in LINC. I have heard a number of prominent businessmen say, 'I call LINC for everything.'"

The library has integrated its reference services into LINC. When someone calls LINC to ask, for example, "How do I get this ink stain out of my new shirt?" his call is transferred through a telenex system to the Science Department of the library. LINC has resulted in a tremendous upsurge in the vol-

ume of information questions directed to the library, which means greatly increased use of all reference departments.

"All told," explains Wallis, "we are answering close to a million and a half questions a year. We had a 276 percent increase from 1975, when we opened LINC, to 1978. About eighteen hundred to two thousand calls a month are community I&R questions answered by LINC—'How do I get my lights turned on?' 'Where's a good summer camp to send my child?' and so forth. The remainder are standard reference questions, using traditional library tools such as reference books and encyclopedias. Overall, reference questions are still going up 12 to 15 percent a year."

Wallis is convinced that the services of a skilled social worker on the library staff is essential to a successful I&R service. "Librarians just don't understand social work, or social workers, or the people who deal with it. A lot of the people we help with LINC never had their foot in a library in their lives; they know little about printed pages. A social worker also understands agency people better than librarians. It helps to have someone who knows agencies—how they operate, how they set up their regulations, the fact that they change constantly, pull up and leave, go bankrupt.

"*We consider a key to our success that we update our information daily.*

"The other key to our success is that we have finally been able to gain the confidence of the local agencies. Squabbling among agencies will kill the program faster than anything. If they get the idea you are cutting in on their territory, they'll become your bitter enemy."

Wallis is convinced that the I&R service must be totally integrated into the library system. "The average social worker or agency representative hasn't the faintest idea of all the resources we have that can help with problems. They know

nothing about the massive collection we've got in business, in technology, in history—the local history room—all the clippings. A librarian who answers a call to LINC can bring to bear all that knowledge and library resources."

Although each branch library in Memphis has a LINC file, the great bulk of LINC calls and referrals are handled at the central library. Croneberger and Luck, at one time strong advocates of a decentralized I&R service, are now convinced that a really high-quality I&R service needs to be concentrated in the central library, where the best trained, most experienced, and most knowledgeable staff are located. They do not believe "everyone can do I&R," although that is not to suggest they believe a separate service would be desirable. Experience tells them that I&R should be an integral part of the library's reference service. The LINC staff shoulders standard library duties in addition to its I&R activities.

The Houston Experience

In Houston, Texas, the library's I&R service is neighborhood-based and is provided through some nineteen full- or part-time special staff working in most but not all branch libraries. Houston, along with Detroit, was one of the most successful participants in a federally funded demonstration Neighborhood Information Centers (NIC) project. Houston launched its NIC program in 1973 in two branches and gradually spread its services. The head of Houston Library's Neighborhood Information Centers, James Mayfield, believes NIC revitalized the entire Houston Public Library system. The library's telephone reference service experienced a growth of over 150 percent in two short years, as a direct re-

sult of publicity about I&R and other library information services. David Hennington, director of the Houston Public Library, credits the NIC program for helping to win the library a 50 percent increase in its budget as well as 142 new positions.

Like Detroit and Memphis, Houston recognizes that a current and accurate resource file is the very heart of an I&R service and consequently puts a great deal of time, effort, and money into this aspect of the service. Updating is a continuous process and is done for the most part by the NIC librarians in the branches, with coordination from the central office.

"We have divided the city into census tracts," explains Mayfield. "Each branch library has the responsibility for a certain neighborhood or area in these tracts, and each NIC person in each of the branches is expected to know absolutely everything there is to know about the neighborhood—every church, school, every park, every social service provided. They should know everything that is going on, from who can perform notary services to who can do typing of transcripts. We do a lot of translating. We don't act as ombudsmen because we don't take an advocacy point of view, but we do assist a great deal, especially in the Mexican-American neighborhoods. We follow up on our referrals to determine if the client has received the proper assistance. I think we know more about the neighborhoods than anybody else in town."

An incredibly valuable service for the citizens of any city, this localized service is particularly relevant to Houston, a Sun Belt city which assimilates upwards of fifteen hundred new residents every week who need information about where things can be found in their new neighborhoods. "The library's clientele ask about a lot of things besides city services —they want to know about dog obedience training, about

tennis courts, racket ball courts, all kinds of leisure classes." Mayfield believes there are strong advantages to having the service decentralized. "There is just no way that a person in a downtown, centralized service can possibly know what's going on in the neighborhoods."

NIC workers are not librarians, they work forty hours a week or less, and much of their time is spent in outreach activities in the neighborhoods—including making a survey of each community to identify the information needs of the specific neighborhood as well as using questionnaires to reach the community through door-to-door canvassing techniques, which enables the NIC staff to promote the entire library program. NIC workers are chosen for their social service orientation and receive no special training other than monthly three-hour in-service training sessions largely given over to speakers from service-providing agencies. The director of NIC maintains close contact with the branches, calling on each of them every month and meeting with the branch head and the NIC representative. Frequently branch heads attend the in-service training meetings. The attitude and commitment to NIC of the individual branch head is crucial to a decentralized NIC operation like Houston's, for it is the branch head who must handle most of the NIC inquiries.

Low-budget I&R Programs

A full-scale I&R program requires commitment and substantial funds for special staff, materials, and services. Realistically, the most promising source of funding for a comprehensive program is the federal government. A rechanneling of

some part of the hundreds of millions of dollars spent each year by Uncle Sam on scatter-gun government information services can and should provide the basic funding for public library information centers.

Not every library can or wants to develop the full-scale comprehensive kind of I&R service of cities like Detroit, Memphis, and Houston. Although not as desirable, it is possible to aim such programs at specifically delineated groups, like the poor or the elderly, or to concentrate on specific topics, like health or legal rights. Here are three examples of imaginative programs that have worked well in other communities.

Montclair, New Jersey

The information and referral service of the Montclair (New Jersey) Public Library has been directed almost entirely at providing needed information to low-income disadvantaged residents of the city of Montclair. The most distinctive feature of the I&R service has been the audiovisual (primarily videotape) information packages produced by the staff and then delivered directly to the target neighborhoods.

Tapes have been produced which tell people about mental illness, nutrition, how to buy small appliances, how to buy children's clothes. The consumer purchasing tapes were filmed in familiar local stores and demonstrated such things as how to check for quality of workmanship, looking for safety factors, allowing for the future growth of a child. The tapes were shown at coffee klatches in homes of people in low-income neighborhoods. Nine or ten people would be invited to watch the tape and then talk about what they had seen. Members of the I&R staff present at the coffee klatches

would have brought with them additional information on the same subject as the tapes—pamphlets, books, magazines, plus the names of agencies people could contact.

Columbus, Ohio

In some communities excellent I&R services are already being provided by other agencies, and there is no need for the public library to duplicate what is already being done well. In Columbus, Ohio, CALL, funded by United Way, provides an I&R service throughout the county. The library cooperates with CALL and provides two useful and highly popular supplementary services—Health-line and Law-line. By dialing Law-line an individual may listen to any one of seventy-five three-to-five-minute cassette tapes dealing with such topics as jaywalking, consumer fraud, tenant-landlord rights, credit for women, child abuse, divorce and dissolution, how to choose an attorney, how to qualify for legal aid. After the tape is played, the operator returns to the line so that the caller may ask to listen to additional tapes or other assistance. The Law-line tapes were produced for the public library by the Columbus Bar Association as a public service to inform people of their basic rights in a variety of commonly experienced situations. The information is basic but comprehensive. The tape on jaywalking (which many out-of-towners have learned Columbus takes seriously) informs the caller where to cross streets, informs him that a police officer may ask for his identification if he is stopped for jaywalking, explains the legal procedures involved if he is arrested, the size of fines, the consequences of not appearing in court, and how a person who feels he is not guilty should proceed.

The library's Health-line offers Columbus citizens three hundred tapes discussing such topics as breast cancer (what it

is and how it is treated, self-examination, other kinds of breast cysts, and so forth), kidney disease, nutrition, childhood diseases, first aid. The most popular Health-line tapes are on topics many people are reluctant to ask about in person—masturbation, female sexual response, homosexuality, fears of the over-forty man, mastectomy. These tapes were produced in California but reviewed and edited for local relevancy by an advisory council of Columbus medical and human service agencies. The service has proven to be particularly helpful in city-wide health crisis situations—such as a recent rabies scare. Publicity for the service has been extensive thanks to a grant from a local drugstore. Bus cards, brochures, personal phone calls to clinics and senior citizen centers, plus radio and TV spots were all part of the publicity blitz. Health-line started in October 1977. In the first ten months, it received 150,000 calls—11,000 in a single day. This rate has now settled down to a steady 500–1,000 calls a month.

Plainedge, New York

The Plainedge (New York) Public Library serves a middle-class population of just under 25,000. Like many suburban communities, the proportion of elderly in the community is sizable—about 10 percent—and growing rapidly. The Plainedge Public Library publishes a newsletter for the elderly called *Discovery*, which is mailed to the home of every over-sixty resident in the community.

Discovery provides information about TOTE, the new, free Red Cross-provided, door-to-door transportation for senior citizens who are physically or financially unable to use other means of transportation for medical services, visits to nutrition sites, and other priority services. (The library staffs the telephone end of this service for the Red Cross.) It relates

details about the volunteer-run FISH program that supplies emergency transportation, service for shut-ins, and emergency help in the home. (The library staffs this phone also.) A typical issue of the newsletter also outlines the Nassau County Bar Association's Lawyer Referral Program set up to provide legal consultation for senior citizens at nominal fees; reprints useful tax information from a Citibank newsletter; carries a short article advising people what they should do before buying a hearing aid; and includes names, addresses, and phone numbers of clinics where hearing-aid professionals can be found. It explains in simple, clear detail how to determine whether or not you are eligible for food stamps.

Discovery is more than a useful fact sheet. It is backed up by an active information and referral staff that produces the newsletter, staffs the phones for the TOTE and FISH programs, and is often able to provide callers with links to additional needed services.

I&R Service in Rural Areas

Professor Stephen A. Webster of the University of Tennessee School of Social Work and his research team studied a largely rural, sixteen-county area in eastern Tennessee, and discovered that there were 919 separate social service entities for local residents. While theoretically every service was available to every resident of each county, the agencies were for the most part based in the city of Knoxville, and a large number of rural residents and agencies were completely unaware of the services they offered. "Frequently," Webster reported, "there is less than minimal commitment to service rural citizens unless they 'come to town.'" He noted the lack of outreach, transportation, or follow-up.

The situation Webster discovered in east Tennessee is not unique. The experience of library-based rural I&R workers confirms Webster's findings. The process of linking up rural residents with needed services is a constant challenge.

Winnie Allard, a librarian who traveled by library van through the Antelope Valley in the Mojave Desert, tells the story of an elderly Australian woman who wanted to become an American citizen but was experiencing difficulty with the bureaucracy and the technical language. The librarian spent several days getting the woman citizenship information. A few months later she discovered the woman had become seriously ill and was unable to travel to downtown Los Angeles to participate in the oath-taking ceremony, the final step to gaining her coveted U.S. citizenship. Under such circumstances the solution would have been for a federal judge to come out to the ill woman to administer the oath, but she was getting a runaround. "No judge wanted to go that far, is what it boiled down to," says Allard, "so we 'semi-threatened' to tell the local paper about the problem." Within a week, a federal judge was on his way to the woman's home in a helicopter, provided by the local sheriff, to administer the citizenship oath.

Allard's library van provided library service of every description to the elderly citizens of Antelope Valley. It was packed with paperback books, books in braille, large-print books, talking books. But it also carried a file of area information and referral contacts, kept a bulletin board posted with current local information, and Allard herself provided follow-up on any problem or question users might have. The van sometimes carried along staff personnel from the local Social Security office or from the Los Angeles County Department of Senior Citizen Affairs, to answer people's questions, to help them fill out forms, and to give direct assistance.

Allard found that elderly rural residents tended to be

remote and suspicious. "They didn't see their problems in terms of information. A lot of our job was developing a sensitivity to what we thought they might need. We had a woman who lived way out in the desert in a hovel. One of the people on the van realized that she needed firewood. We ended up bringing free firewood for her when we brought the van out. People just don't know there are things available to them."

On the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the problems of linking persons in the rural counties with needed services are frequently as challenging as those in the Antelope Valley. A woman living on remote Hooper Islands needed weekly injections for a heart condition but had no way of getting to the city of Cambridge for a doctor. A Dorchester County Public Library staff member knew of a nurse who lived not far from Hooper Islands. The library contacted the Geriatric Evaluation Service of the County Health Department and arranged to have the nurse give the woman her injections. Later, as a result of her visits, the nurse discovered that the woman was visually handicapped and had no heat in the house. She arranged with the County Health Department to help with those problems as well.

In most rural counties, social service agencies are of two types—government agencies (Agricultural Extension Services; school systems; Public Health; Public Welfare) and local service clubs (Masons, Lions, rescue squads). The service clubs, which take up the slack for low-income emergency cases, function on an informal basis. The rural I&R worker must acquire an intimate working knowledge of these clubs and the people who run them, in addition to being aware of services from public agencies. The Memphis I&R service, for example, received a call from a couple living in an outlying area who needed emergency house repairs—their plumbing was out of order, and they needed new doors and plastering.

The I&R staff contacted a service club in their area and asked it to take on the repair work as a project. The club agreed and provided the necessary labor, tools, and equipment (one of their members was a plumber). The library was able to get the new doors by asking local stores to donate them.

One of the greatest challenges to an effective rural I&R service is public awareness. I&R services in urban centers need a certain amount of media advertising, but their best promotion comes from cooperative social service agencies. In order to educate the public about their rural I&R services, on the other hand, three county libraries on Maryland's Eastern Shore (which had received federal LSCA funds to launch their I&R services) developed a variation on Detroit's "community walk" which they call "drop-ins." These were regularly scheduled visits to members of the area's informal information network—gas station attendants, local merchants, volunteer firemen, policemen, ministers. The purpose of the visits was to give the I&R staff direct personal contact with key individuals in the community to explain the purpose of the library's I&R service, and to request that they inform customers, clients, or neighbors about the service whenever they felt it was appropriate. They were also asked to post library flyers and to give out brochures. "Drop-ins" proved to be an unusually effective method of publicizing the new service.

In Oklahoma the I&R library staffs in highly rural Osage and Creek counties undertook intensive "seek and find" outreach efforts, making hundreds of personal visits to individual homes to explain the library's service and other agency programs and to assess individual needs. The I&R service in these two counties is provided by the Tulsa Public Library and is directed to senior citizens only (in the city of Tulsa the library provides a comprehensive I&R service). The goal has been to help older people live independently and safely in

their own homes for as long as possible. The library found that counseling, encouragement, and support are often all an older person needs to live a more abundant life. Some contacts were a simple matter of information or referral; others required a long-term commitment by the I&R staff.

"A great many older people reject anything to do with 'welfare,'" report the Creek County workers, "but personal attention from the staff of the rural I&R, and trust in their activities, often makes 'acceptable' services the elderly might not otherwise accept." The Creek County staff has worked closely with the Welfare Department's nontechnical medical-care program. A list of in-home providers is kept in the I&R office, and elderly people needing home care are helped to apply for this assistance. The I&R staff also helps its senior clients cope with printed forms from social service agencies. Many of these forms seem obscure to older people; they frequently think that a form means their assistance has ended. They do not always understand the terms used. Some, because of poor eyesight, actually cannot read the form.

In Creek County the library I&R staff discovered that in the town of Bristow many older people who qualified for assistance were not applying for food stamps because the Welfare Department representative met with applicants on the third floor of City Hall, where elevator service was not available and the rickety stairs were difficult to negotiate. The I&R staff arranged with the Welfare Department to supply senior citizen applications once each month at the Senior Center.

The extremely personal nature of rural I&R library service is apparent from the following description of services provided in Creek County by one of its I&R workers:

> Reading and writing letters for people who can do neither, typing copies of recipes for women who want to share,

counseling a retarded woman, sacking and distributing seeds donated by the Community Action Program, making a meat loaf for a man who had just had all his teeth extracted, gearing up several agencies to provide help for burned-out families in the area.

Concludes Phyllis Jobe, who runs the Tulsa Public Library I&R service, "It should be apparent that the nature of I&R becomes, by necessity, different as a function moves from the metropolitan to the rural setting." Nevertheless, although the level of service may be much more personal, "the basic principles are the same: accurate information; trustworthiness; coordination and cooperation between agencies; accessibility."

The Value of Computers

"We're so hungry," the man said, standing beside his pregnant wife. "We just got to have something to eat. But I don't have any money. Please help us."

The couple were in the Fair Oaks branch library in Redwood City, California. It was after 8 P.M. The librarian telephoned the city's main library, which has a teletype machine. There, the reference librarian typed out a form, keyed it with an identifying account number, and fed it into Stanford University's computer complex. In an instant, SPIRES (Stanford Public Information Retrieval System) searched 560 categories and came back with an answer. The couple were sent off to nearby St. Anthony's Church, where they found help.

San Mateo is the first county library system in California to establish a single I&R program county-wide, linking seven city and nine county branch libraries. It is also the first in the

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nation to use computers. Each library is equipped with teletype machines that can directly contact the Stanford computer. The data base is equipped to answer such questions as how to adopt a child, where to go for family counseling, where to get a cat spayed inexpensively. The computer provides answers in English or Spanish. If the user who seeks the information is present at the library, he or she can get the computer's printed answer to take home.

An Information Consortium began meeting regularly in the early 1970s to discuss common concerns about information and referral in San Mateo County. Out of these discussions came the Peninsula Library System's Computerized Community Information Project (CIP), begun in 1974 as an LSCA-funded demonstration I&R service. Consortium members found that reliance on directories as the major tools for resource information had severe shortcomings because of the large number of services, the frequent changes in existing resources, and the never-ending creation of new resources. Libraries were identified as the ideal sites for I&R services. Stanford University's generalized information storage and retrieval system was brought to the attention of the consortium as a potential method and place for managing a computerized I&R file.

From its inception, CIP worked closely with nonlibrary agencies, resulting in the elimination of duplication of file maintenance and information gathering and the combining of professional expertise, thereby giving substantially improved information services to the people of the county.

Jane Irby, CIP's former director, describes SPIRES as a very flexible, sophisticated system which does not require much knowledge of computers from those who use it. A few hours is all that is necessary to train reference librarians to

search the file. The Peninsula libraries already had a teletype system for many interlibrary communications. The use of a microwave teletype system made it possible for distant libraries to search the Stanford file without making a toll call.

CIP provides a centrally developed and controlled I&R file plus decentralized delivery of specific information. When a CIP staff member changes a phone number for an agency, or enters a new service to the file, the new information becomes available to all users the following morning. A major advantage of using SPIRES for file management rather than a manual card file or a directory is the capacity for a computer to handle most of the paper work involved in updating information about the resources listed in the file. Many large I&R files are never systematically and completely verified and updated because of the huge amount of clerical time involved. It is quite simple to program a computer to print copies of each file entry, a cover letter, and mailing labels to mail out data to specific agencies for verification and update.

The CIP system employs several indices and uses as many terms within each index as necessary, thereby providing optimum access to the file. Each agency or service can be retrieved by any one or combination of the following categories: agency name (each significant word in the name is part of the index), city of location, language other than English spoken at the agency, geographic area served, and key words describing the service needed (such as "low-cost spay clinic").

There are some disadvantages to computerizing an I&R file. According to Jane Irby, the "chief drawbacks would be cost, restricted access (if the library is sharing a computer), and the nonexistence of a good thesaurus for human services." The latter problem is a major stumbling block at present.

"The esoteric jargon of the social welfare field is a real Tower of Babel," says Tom Deahl, former director of the Model Cities Community Information Center in Philadelphia. "Human service providers don't speak a common language." The terms are so vague that this is a major problem in designing a computerized I&R file. Mrs. Irby feels there is some compensation for this shortcoming in the unlimited indexing capability, use of synonyms, and so forth, but that the absence of a controlled vocabulary does make attempts to develop subject or service indexing a rather arbitrary exercise.

Mrs. Irby also points out the problem of breaking down the barrier of the librarians' reluctance to use any kind of machine.

Many of those who have had experience with computerized I&R files emphasize the desirability of maintaining a manual file as well, despite the inevitability of much overlapping and duplication in the two systems. Houston, for example, probably will not computerize a good bit of its highly localized information. Helen Marshall, formerly with the Langston Hughes Community Information Center of the Queens Borough Public Library, who also worked on planning a Citizens Urban Information Center, has stated that "computerized data bases are not always the answer because computers are so numerically oriented that much of the information just 'doesn't fit.'" She believes I&R service to be such a people-oriented, people-run undertaking that much more depends on the caliber of the *person* who is there, dispensing and *interpreting* the information, than on machine efficiency. Jane Irby puts it even more sharply, "I'd like to emphasize that you cannot computerize information and referral. You can computerize your file, but information and referral is a service that takes human beings."

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The Growing Maze of Social Service Agencies

A recently issued General Accounting Office (GAO) report recommends that the federal government appoint a task force to develop, for consideration by Congress, a national policy and plan to promote the establishment of community information centers.

The GAO report, issued in 1978 and entitled "Information and Referral for People Needing Human Services—A Complex System That Should Be Improved," makes clear the existing chaos in delivery of human services in the United States. More than $100 billion in federal funds is spent annually on health, rehabilitation, employment, income maintenance, nutrition, education, and other programs designed to assist people. These programs are funded by a multitude of agencies, each with its own areas of interest and specialization. The report notes that "although many such programs are available, linking people with appropriate services is difficult." The profusion of agencies and programs providing human services have become so specialized that the delivery of these services has become highly fragmented. In Seattle, Washington, for example, over 1,100 agencies provide over 3,000 service programs.

A 1975 HEW-funded analysis of information needs of disadvantaged individuals observed that the needy are faced with a maze of agencies that seem to compete with each other. The study concluded that the uncoordinated activities and bewildering complexity of the system confuse the needy and prevent them from receiving benefits. "The system has become so complex," reported the GAO, "that even professionals in the field are unable to keep abreast of what services are provided by which agencies."

The GAO further noted that although many agencies provide I&R, most of them have succeeded neither in coordinating their services with one another nor in assuring that they provide adequate I&R. They have become part of the maze they were supposed to penetrate. Although the GAO did not attempt to determine the total nationwide cost of providing I&R, the report revealed that "several Federal agencies' officials provided us estimates that showed the combined costs of I&R activities to be hundreds of millions of dollars annually." One consultant for HEW estimated the cost of I&R in one large community to be as much as $100 million annually.

The deficiencies of the present national I&R "system"—inadequate resource files, lack of follow-up, limited scope of I&R service, lack of quality control—leads all too often to what is known as "ping-ponging" of the client from agency to agency. "A community worker in Portland, Oregon," the report noted, "spent 35 hours contacting 41 agencies trying to follow up on every lead given to her to resolve a single need—housing—for *one* client."

The GAO report outlines the following goals for better coordination of the present scattered array of services:

1. Eliminate duplication of information and referral services among federal agencies.

2. Pool federal resources with state, local, and private resources to form and operate comprehensive information and referral centers.

3. Elicit the cooperation of federal, state, local, and private organizations.

4. Evaluate alternatives for information and referral and determine which are most cost-effective.

It is not without significance that the report fails to mention the considerable involvement of public libraries in the I&R field. The word "library" appears nowhere in the text.

CONCLUSION

"I am thoroughly sold on the idea that the urban public library's main future is information service," says C. Lamar Wallis of Memphis. "The neighborhood branches can handle circulation of books and ordinary home reading. The main library can do that too, but the chief function of the main library should be to be an information center—to give out every kind of information that it can possibly give."

It may be an uphill battle to gain recognition for the library's potential role in I&R. When the General Accounting Office report on the need for better information services across the nation failed to recognize the work that public libraries were already doing to help meet that need, it reflected the tunnel vision that has long affected the federal government's general approach to the role of public libraries. "Typical," says Wallis. "The library is always written off by everybody. Unfortunately the average bureaucrat, and, I guess, the average person on the street, still thinks of the public library as a rather small, insignificant operation. This is changing in this city and in a lot of cities. I believe information services will bring about the change—just as soon as people learn they can go to the library and get answers to any kind of question they might have."

Already the message is getting through. In a draft study bill for a new National Library Act filed in May 1979 by Senators Edward M. Kennedy and Jacob K. Javits, information and referral services are designated as programs that should receive substantial federal funding as one of the major

tools for serving library users and potential users in a more constructive way. Among the concepts included in the bill is the idea of a national data network with instant access to full information on government assistance programs for the individual, as well as technical, research, and information exchange material in the more conventional sense.

The dawn of a new day of expanded user services, federal-state matching funds and special grants, and the benefits of technological advance appears to be at hand. Whether the dawn will turn into day will largely depend on how citizens express their desire for more of this kind of support for public libraries.